

CHURCH NEWS

FROM THE NORTHERN COUNTRIES

Edited by
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Northern Ecumenical Meeting in Denmark Next Year.

The Board of the Northern Ecumenical Institute at its meeting at Båstad resolved to arrange a Northern ecumenical meeting at Nyborg Strand, Denmark, from June 26 - 30, 1958. Plans were also made for a Northern journalists' meeting, likewise to take place in Denmark.

As president for the coming year the Board elected Mr. Kristian Hansson, Director of the Government Department on Church and Education, Oslo, and Bishop Manfred Björkquist, Sigtuna, was re-elected vice-president.

Meeting for Northern Mission Hotels in Denmark.

The Northern Mission Hotel Organizations recently met for a joint conference in Aarhus, Denmark, at which Director Georg Svenrud, Linköping, Sweden, was elected Northern president for the next three years. At the meeting the secretary of the Swedish organizations, the editor Per Helin, emphasized that the mission hotels and other hotels under Christian management should not be second-rate affairs, but of a high standard, and that their special characteristics should be, if possible, even better and more ready service than at other hotels.

DENMARK

"Conference of European Churches" Founded at Liselund.

The European Church meeting at Liselund, Denmark, from May 27-31, was attended by approximately 70 members of 39 churches in 15 countries. There were no representatives of the Lutheran churches in Germany and no delegates from the Lutheran churches in the Northern countries, only two observers from Denmark. The Anglican Church was not represented either but an observer sent by the British Council of Churches was present as was also a representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople. The following countries in Eastern Europe were represented: Czechoslovakia, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Hungary and Yugoslavia. An observer from the Pomeranian Evangelical Church could not obtain an exit permit.

At the meeting it was decided to set up a "Conference of European Churches" as a regional organization in "working relationship" with the

World Council of Churches. A temporary Board was elected, consisting of President Held, President Wilm, President F. Hildebrandt and Dr. Kloppenburg from Germany, Secretary General E. Emmen, Holland, Professor J.B. Soucek, Czechoslovakia, Secretary General P. Conord, France, Rev. Albert Ribet, Italy, President Z. Michelis, Poland, Bishop Kiivit, Estonia, and Rev. J. Muraközy, Hungary, besides a representative of the Free Churches in predominantly Lutheran countries and possibly a representative from Switzerland. At the same time an Executive Committee was set up consisting of President Held, Secretary General Dr. Emmen and Bishop Kiivit.

It was resolved to approach the European Churches who had not wanted to take part in the meeting, requesting them to join the Conference and at the same time stressing the point that, as soon as this happened, the Board would be re-organized accordingly. It was further decided to set up a permanent secretariat in Holland and a vote of thanks was rendered to Dr. Kloppenburg, the present secretary, for his energetic and efficient work. As to which Churches might be included in the working fellowship of the Conference it was decided that all European Churches which are members of the World Council of Churches were of course to be invited, but the Conference should also be open to other Churches, not yet members of the World Council of Churches. However, the Russian Orthodox Church should not be invited until its present negotiations with the World Council of Churches had been completed.

One of the working committees at the meeting suggested various fields of activity in which practical co-operation would be natural, such as, for instance, exchange of theological literature, mutual information, joint discussions on the preaching of the Church in a secularized community, and the like. This practical co-operation will be taken up already now, but the main task of the temporary Board will probably be the negotiations with the Churches not yet represented about their joining in the Conference.

In a leading article the "Kristeligt Dagblad", Copenhagen, which is the only Scandinavian paper which has reported in detail on the meeting and also has stated the misgivings concerning it on the part of the German Lutheran Churches, declares itself in favour of the Northern Churches joining in this European ecclesiastical collaboration immediately without waiting for the decision of the German sister Churches. The paper feels that, from a Christian point of view, it would be unjustified to desist from participation in the exchange of views with Eastern clergymen which such a co-operation makes possible.

Bishop Lajos Ordass, Hungary, took part in the meeting at Liselund and for two days after the Conference he was the guest of Bishop H. Fuglsang-Damgaard in Copenhagen and he preached in the Cathedral on the following Sunday.

"The Ecumenical Work Nothing But Ecclesiastical Patch Work".

The former Danish Minister of Church Affairs, Dean Carl Hermansen, in an article in the Grundtvigian weekly "Dansk Kirketidende" strongly attacks the ecumenical movement which he describes as being "ecclesiastical patch work", to use an expression by Professor Lindhardt of Aarhus. "It is a place where one may sit and patch the worn purple of the Church", he writes, "and play at conducting synods in the grand old manner at which one organizes and plans on behalf of all Christendom". Participation in meetings like the conference of the Lutheran World

Federation in Minneapolis he describes as being "fun for those who manage to get away and meet a lot of interesting people", but otherwise of no particular consequence.

Bishop Gudmund Schiøler, Roskilde, himself a disciple of Grundtvig and a member of the Danish delegation to Minneapolis, in a reply to Dean Hermansen in the same periodical points out that it is unhealthy for a Church to become sufficient unto herself. "A Church isolating herself is, as a rule, herself the loser", he writes. The Bishop refutes the misunderstanding that the Church meetings nowadays attempt to act as a resurrection of the Church synods of ancient times at which resolutions were passed, binding for all affiliated Churches, and he stresses the importance both of the Church relief work and of the intercourse between the representatives of the Churches.

Danish Free Church to Be Established in South Slesvig?

The Danish Kirchentag held in Slesvig recently in a resolution requested the South Slesvig Church Council to "continue and hasten the investigations concerning the possibility of establishing an independent Danish Church in South Slesvig". At the meeting the Senior Rector in South Slesvig, Dean A. Westergård Jacobsen, went in for the establishment of such a Danish Free Church, independent of the Slesvig-Holstein Regional Church, and the majority of the participants in the Kirchentag also seemed to be of this opinion. However, it was also suggested that before taking any steps in this direction, efforts should be made once more to persuade the Regional Church to recognize the Danish Church work as being part of the work of the Regional Church.

Dean Westergård Jacobsen felt that the establishment of a Free Church was the only possible solution at the moment as one could not be satisfied with the Language Act of May 1955 of the German Regional Church. The Act permits the employment of German at Church functions conducted by Danish clergymen, but Danish clergymen may not preach in German at services in the churches belonging to the Regional Church, just as the law does not say anything about the pastoral work among those who have left the Regional Church. In January 1956 the Danish Church Council voiced certain objections and questions in connection with the Language Act, but so far no reply has been received from the Regional Church.

The reason for having postponed the actual establishment of a Free Church until now is that many of the people in South Slesvig who are members of the Danish congregations are reluctant to resign from membership in the Regional Church to which they feel bound with ties of tradition. If, at the end, it is decided to establish a Free Church, something which the Regional Church has suggested several times, such resignations from the Regional Church will be necessary and the various Ministries in Kiel must agree to recognize the Danish Free Church. The Senior Rector proposed that the solidarity with the Lutheran National Church in Denmark should be emphasized by calling the new Church "The Danish Lutheran National Church in South Slesvig".

Danish Clergyman Converts to Roman Catholic Church.

It has caused attention in Denmark that a clergyman in the Danish Lutheran National Church, the Rev. Sigfred Riishøjgård, rector of Rise, has joined the Roman Catholic Church and resigned his office in order to become a teacher at the Roman Catholic school in Kolding.

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Rev. Riishøjgård motivates his action by stating that after long studies he has become convinced that the Roman Catholic Church is the true Church while the Protestant Churches are only like the sawed off branches of a tree in which there is no longer life nor strength. He emphasizes in particular the powerlessness of the Lutheran National Church in the face of moral decay evident in, among other things, the fact that a new Abortion Act was passed last year in Denmark allowing for induced abortion on partly social grounds.

Orthodox Liturgy in Danish for the First Time.

For the first time the St. John Chrysostomus liturgy was performed recently in Danish in the St. Alexander Nevsky's Church in Copenhagen. The Russian Orthodox bishop, Bishop Georgius of Syracuse, celebrated mass in the presence of the Lutheran Bishop of Copenhagen, Bishop H. Fuglsang-Damgaard. The Orthodox congregation in Copenhagen includes members of various nationalities, but many of the younger generation speak Danish. The service had a special ecumenical character as several members of the choir belonged to the Danish Lutheran National Church.

FINLAND

Special Ritual for Solemnizing Marriage of Divorced Persons?

The Church Law Committee preparing the proposals to be put before the Synod of the Finnish Lutheran National Church in 1958 suggests, among other things, an amendment in regard to the re-marriage of divorced persons. While clergymen at present are forced to solemnize the re-marriage of divorcees without any exceptions, the new proposal would give them a free hand. It also suggests that it should be allowed at such marriages to employ a special ritual in which the position of the clergyman as a servant of the community is stressed, i.e. a kind of civil marriage performed by a minister.

The question of re-marriage of divorcees has been dealt with by no less than thirteen Synods since 1886 and the new proposal does not seem either to meet with approval by all quarters. Thus the Finland-Swedish weekly "Församlingsbladet" describes the idea of two different wedding rituals as "an ecclesiastical personality split".

When the Finnish Church Synod of 1953 proposed that clergymen should be free to refuse to re-marry divorced people the Finnish Parliament rejected this proposal and thus the amendment could not come into force.

Among other proposals to be put forward by the Church Law Committee is one suggesting that a Cathedral Chapter should be allowed to grant laymen the right to administer the eucharist to the minister in connection with the ordinary communion service of the congregation in parishes with only one parson. This right should only be extended for a period of five years at the most. The "Församlingsbladet" is opposed to this proposal also as it feels that it is without theological foundation, and emphasizes the self-communion of the minister as being the right procedure, both from a natural and from a theological point of view.

The various proposals made by the Church Law Committee will now be studied at clergymen's, deaneries' and diocesan meetings before final decision is passed at the Synod next year.

The Orthodox Church in Finland to Remain Under Constantinople.

The Metropolitan Nikolaj visited Finland in May as the representative of the Russian Orthodox Church, and at a meeting in Kuopio with the leaders of the Finnish Orthodox Church he discussed the differences of opinion existing between Finland's Orthodox Church and the Russian Patriarchate.

According to a statement issued after the meeting it proceeded in a friendly and understanding atmosphere, and agreement was reached in all matters discussed. It was decided to preserve status quo in canonical respects, i.e. the Finnish Orthodox Church remains an autonomous Church community under the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and this decision was apparently also approved by the Metropolitan. The disagreement in regard to the spiritual and canonical position of the Valamo Monastery was also settled, the Moscow Patriarchate desisting from its claim of spiritual sovereignty over the Monastery.

The outcome of the negotiations was received with satisfaction by Finnish Orthodox quarters, Vice Bishop Paavali stated after the meeting. There is now a possibility of a natural development of the good relationship between the two Orthodox Churches.

Finnish Parliament Presented With a Bible on Its Golden Jubilee.

Last month the Finnish Parliament celebrated its 50th anniversary and in connection with the celebrations a leather covered Bible was presented to Parliament by the congregation in whose parish the Parliament building is situated. The gift was handed over by Dean Urho Paljakka and the Rev. Juho Tenhiälä who, on behalf of the givers, expressed the joy that the Bible will now have its fixed place in Parliament. The Speaker, V.J. Sukkellainen, accepted the present and expressed the hope that the heritage which for centuries has been the ground on which the Finnish nation is built might in future also be its viaticum.

At the special service in the Storkyrkan on the occasion of the jubilee Archbishop Ilmari Salomies preached and said, among other things

"In our days it becomes even more clear to those who really wish the best for our country, and no harm, that we need a new mind if we are to be saved from great disasters. We need to see that, besides myself and those bound to me by common advantages and difficulties, there is in this world also another human being with his difficulties, advantages, and hopes. We are called to consider not only what is best for ourselves, but, as brethren and sisters of the others, we must also think of what is best for them."

Finnish Technologists Erect Their Own Church.

A group of students at the Technical University in Helsinki (Helsingfors) has erected a church in very modern style. It was dedicated recently by the Bishops Elis Gulin and G.O. Rosenqvist and handed over to the Technical University.

The original idea came from the Technological Students' Christian Association "Ristin Kilta" (Guild of the Cross) which has been extremely active for a number of years. The association was founded in 1947 as a joint organization of two rapidly growing Bible study groups and its members have contributed, among other things, to work amongst old people and in Sunday schools, to Northern co-operation and foreign mission.

The newly completed church or chapel was designed by the architect Heikki Sirén and is not at all on traditional lines. Behind the altar-piece is a wall of glass through which the light pours into the church and the altar-piece is a white cross on the dark background of the forest growing outside.

The means for building the church have been found, partly by the students themselves, partly by collections in various congregations.

News in Brief.

The Finnish Parliament has received the gift of a photographic copy of the page in the enrolment register of the University of Wittenberg from 1536-1537 on which the name of the Finnish reformer, Mikael Agri-cola, who was a student in the town that year, may be found.

ICELAND

Skálholt to Be the Future See of Iceland?

A proposal has been introduced in the Icelandic Parliament to the effect that the residence of the Head of the Icelandic National Church should in future be at Skálholt, the place where the see of Iceland was first established. The Government was requested by Parliament to prepare the legislation for moving the see from Reykjavik to Skálholt.

The new cathedral at Skálholt, the foundation stone for which was laid during the jubilee celebrations last summer, is now so far completed that the nave is under roof. New gifts for the church are still arriving from all over the Northern countries so that no other church in the Northern countries may boast of being a more co-operative affair.

NORWAY

Bitter Controversy Concerning Eternal Torment and About Albert Schweitzer.

As mentioned briefly in the last number of Church News the old leader of "Indre Mission", Professor Ole Hallesby, at a meeting in Jaeren at the beginning of May sharply attacked Bishop Kristian Schjelderup who has declared publicly that he does not share in the belief in eternal torment, while he pays deference to the authority of Jesus in the matter of perdition itself. In his address Professor Hallesby also opposed a radio talk in which Bishop Schjelderup has called Albert Schweitzer a Christian although his theology and philosophy are

not, and Professor Hallesby called to action against both heterodoxy and teachers of heterodoxy in the Norwegian Church.

The address has caused attention in wide circles and given rise to a lively debate. "Indre Mission" and most of the other voluntary Christian organizations are backing up Professor Hallesby and maintain that only a clear recantation by Bishop Schjelderup may once more establish peace in the Church. Other circles, including "Indre Mission in Oslo" which is independent of "Indre Mission in Norway", warn against the threatening breach between "Indre Mission" and the Church. The president of "Indre Mission in Oslo", the Rev. Alex Johnson, in a speech recently appealed to the opponents of Bishop Schjelderup to "combine the passion for truth with an understanding charity and try to accept everything in the best possible spirit". He declared that "Indre Mission in Oslo" does not waver a hair's breadth from the Word of God and the Confession of the Church, but at the same time the organization wishes to be in complete accordance with and loyal to the Norwegian Lutheran National Church.

SWEDEN

Lutheran Delegation to Siberia Next Year?

The Lutheran World Federation hopes to send a delegation of Church leaders to Siberia next spring in order to establish contact with a large group of Lutheran Christians, mostly of German origin, living there, it was stated recently by the Director of the Department of World Service of the Lutheran World Federation, the Rev. Bengt Hoffman, in an interview in the Swedish daily "Morgon-Bladet".

Rev. Hoffman says that it is estimated that there are about one million Lutherans in Siberia, predominantly Germans who were forced to move from the Don basin in the 1930's, but also some Estonians and a few others of Swedish origin. It is known that in the Lutheran Church in Siberia, the existence of which has only recently been ascertained with certainty, there is at least one ordained pastor, while the congregations on the whole are looked after by specially ordained laymen. Last autumn the Lutheran World Federation received an application from the Church in Siberia for 10,000 confirmation certificates, and the printing of a large consignment of Bibles intended for Siberia has just been completed in Germany. A number of book parcels have also been despatched to Siberia and they are known to have reached the addressees.

Some time ago the Lutheran World Federation sent in an application to the Soviet Russian authorities in question for permission to send a delegation to Siberia, but so far no answer has been received. Bishop Sven Danell, Skara, is expected to be the Northern representative in a possible delegation.

If a delegation should actually succeed in going to Siberia, it is hoped to pay a visit also to a small Mennonite Church said to be in existence there.

Office Personnel in Stockholm on Church Excursion.

One of Stockholm's city rectors, the Rev. Allan Rosengren from St. Jacob's Church, recently invited the office personnel of five big concerns in the centre of the city on a "Church excursion". The goal was Sigtuna, the centre for much voluntary work of the Swedish Lutheran National Church. Here the members first attended a morning service and after a visit to the Laymen's school the outing finished off in the home of Olov Hartman, Director of the Sigtuna Foundation.

A similar excursion is planned for the autumn. Rev. A. Rosengren will also conduct a trip to Paris this summer to which office personnel from the city of Stockholm in particular will be invited. Every morning throughout the year there are special morning devotions in St. Jacob's Church, intended for office clerks on their way to work.

Protest Against Reduction of Christian Instruction in Schools.

In a communication to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education a delegation from the Swedish Ecumenical Council representing most of the Swedish Church communities, stated that it is the general wish of the confessed Christians in Sweden that the number of hours in Christian instruction in the first class of the colleges remains unaltered. The reason for this communication is the proposal for cutting down the weekly hours of instruction in religion from two to one.

The delegation emphasized the pedagogical difficulties involved in cutting down the lessons to half the number, and it is pointed out that instruction in Christianity should be part of the character forming upbringing which is the essential task of education. The result of this action was that there will be no change in the present number of hours.

News in Brief.

- A member of the staff of the Swedish National Broadcasting Service, Dr. Nils-Olof Franzén, at a meeting arranged by the Christian Information Service recently, stated that in addition to the present morning devotions at 7:40 a.m., a daily morning devotional service at an earlier hour will presently be commenced. On the other hand, there will be no regular religious events in the Second Programme.

- The Swedish Ecumenical Council has decided to launch an advertising campaign for the observance of the Sunday during February 1958.

